

Issues of Chronology

*Part VI of the Sabbath and Jubilee
of 701/700 and 700/699 B.C.E.*

The last argument advanced to support the two-invasion hypothesis is the charge that the Assyrian records and Scriptures, as well as the other ancient versions of Sennacherib's invasion of Judah, are incompatible, contradicting each other with regard to their chronology. Kemper Fullerton, for example, came to the "very serious conclusion" that the Assyrian records and the biblical narrative "are in irreconcilable contradiction."¹ These supposed contradictions are then held up as a basis for disassociating Sennacherib's third campaign of 701 B.C.E. from the ill-fated part of the invasion reported by Scriptures. As a result, it is then claimed that Scriptures and other non-Assyrian sources are either confused or they deliberately merged two separate invasions into one legendary story.

This charge of inconsistency is simply untrue. It arose chiefly because of the misidentification of the Tirhaqah in Scriptures with the Kushite pharaoh of Egypt, Nefertem Taharqa, and the chronology such an association involves. Now that we have eliminated this problem, it is merely a matter of allowing the internal evidence from the relevant ancient texts to determine their respective chronological arrangement and place. The most reliable course is to admit the basic validity of all our ancient texts: Scriptures, Assyrian, and secondary sources. Laying these sources alongside one another we find that each tells its own part of the drama and that each is clearly interrelated with the others.

To demonstrate the fidelity and harmony of only one invasion, Parallel Corpora A has been provided at the end of this chapter. This corpora places the Assyrian and secondary sources in parallel with the three important versions found in Scriptures. The reader will readily see that the story they tell is complete and uncontradictory, allowing for only one attack on Judah by King Sennacherib. In turn, this evidence will seal our dating of the Sabbath and Jubilee years during the reign of King Hezekiah as 701/700 and 700/699 B.C.E., Abib reckoning.

Background for the Parallel Stories

To understand the chronology of these parallel stories we must first reiterate several points already established by our research. To begin with, all ancient sources confess to only one invasion of Judah by Sennacherib.² The records also show that this campaign was aimed primarily against Egypt.³ The attack on Judah, the ally of Egypt and Kush, was merely part of that greater war.

¹ BS, 63, p. 587.

² See Chap. V.

³ Chap. VI, pp. 81–85, and p. 85, n. 47.

At the same time, each of our sources approach the story from a different perspective. They included only those portions of the history believed by their authors to be necessary. The Assyrians, for example, felt the need to report victories. To accommodate this political and propaganda goal, the Assyrian scribes often left out negative details and readjusted the order of events to create an illusion of success when failure had actually occurred.⁴ What they did report was accurate in its details, but they often circumvented the truth by omission and by interpretation. This method is apparent with the Assyrian records from Sennacherib's third campaign. Not only does the internal data reveal an altered chronology and a hollow claim of victory, but, when we compare its history with that found in Scriptures, one finds the order of events tactfully switched around.⁵ The basic information of each event, though chronologically rearranged, is nevertheless valid.

The Assyrian records of Sennacherib's third campaign also deal with its subject matter based upon geographical considerations: discussing the occurrences in Phoenicia first, Palestia second, and Judah last, regardless of the fact that many of the events reported in the Palestim and Judahite parts of the conflict were parallel.⁶ The battle at Eltekeh and the conquest of Ekron, for instance, followed the payment of tribute by Hezekiah and did not precede it.⁷ Also, Padi was returned to the throne of Ekron after having been freed from his captivity in Jerusalem, not before.⁸

Scriptures, meanwhile, emphasized those aspects of the campaign which encompassed deliverance: the deliverance of the city of Jerusalem (a type of the future deliverance of the city from Gog and Magog)⁹ and the personal deliverance of King Hezekiah (representative of the king messiah).¹⁰ Its author did not see the necessity of dealing with the Phoenician, Palestim, and Egyptian portions of the history. The story found in 2 Chronicles, meanwhile, is an abridgement of the versions found in Isaiah and 2 Kings. Yet it also provides parts of the history not included by the other two.¹¹

Secondary sources had their own agenda. Josephus was more interested in reporting the history of his nation. To help convince his readers, he brought in details from other sources. The later Talmudic writers cared about the prophetic significance of the story as it related to Jewish culture (for example, pointing out the importance of the destruction of the Assyrian army on Passover). The

⁴ Chap. VI, pp. 79–81.

⁵ For example, the Assyrians list the payment of Hezekiah's tribute after the blockade of Jerusalem while Scriptures and Josephus both report that Hezekiah paid tribute before Rabshakeh was even sent to Jerusalem to begin the blockade (see below Parallel Corpora A, pp. 117–121).

⁶ For example, the battle at Eltekeh occurred during the initial stages of the blockade of Jerusalem, not before that blockade began, as listed in the Assyrian records (cf. below Parallel Corpora A, pp. 121–130).

⁷ See below Parallel Corpora A, pp. 121–129.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Cf. the deliverance of Jerusalem from Sennacherib and his army with Ezek., 38:1–39:29 and Rev. 20:7–9.

¹⁰ For the personal deliverance of Hezekiah, see below Parallel Corpora A, pp. 132–146.

¹¹ I.e., 2 Chron., 32:2–8, 32:11, 32:14f, 32:16–19, 32:22–23.

Egyptian version, told by Herodotus, was only concerned with the miraculous deliverance of the Egyptians, while Berossus, the Chaldaean historian, saw the war in historical terms as a great defeat of the Assyrians.

Some of these accounts give extended quotes while others only quote in part. Some go to great lengths to discuss certain aspects of the war while others avoid those details altogether. Yet none of these preferences justify discrediting any of our sources. It is merely a matter of laying out every version in parallel, as we have done in Parallel Corpora A. Then, by simply allowing the sources to define their history for us, the harmony is readily seen. In reality, these ancient accounts, when used in conjunction with one another, agree perfectly. As one reads through these parallel versions, considering all of the evidence heretofore presented, the following complete and well-balanced history is recovered.

Invasion of Western Asia

In the winter of 702/701 B.C.E. (no later than mid-February of 701 B.C.E.), in the 14th year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib made a surprise offensive against western Asia and the Egyptian Empire. With an armed force of roughly half a million men,¹² he first attacked the rebel Phoenician city-states led by Luli, king of Sidon.¹³

After securing Phoenicia, many of the rebellious kings of that region, as well as the Trans-Jordan states of Ammon, Moab, and Edom, and the northernmost of the coastal Palestim (Philistine) city-state, Ashdod (which had not survived the earlier revolt of 712 B.C.E. with Judah and the remaining parts of Palestia),¹⁴ met Sennacherib at Ushû to submit.¹⁵ King Hezekiah of Judah and the rest of the Palestim states, who were allied with each other and with Egypt, on the other hand, continued to resist. They laid their hope in the promise of assistance coming from both the kings of Egypt as well as their Kushite overlord (Chart D), Pharaoh Shabaqo (Shabako, Shabaka).¹⁶

Marching southward along the coast (Map 1), Sennacherib next struck at some tributary cities belonging to the Palestim city-state of Ashkelon (Joppa, Beth-Dagon, etc.).¹⁷ These cities were located north of Palestia (Philistia) proper. Carrying off their spoils, the Assyrian king then moved south against Ashkelon, the next major city along the coast after Ashdod. He quickly conquered

¹² Chap. VII, pp. 94–97.

¹³ See below Parallel Corpora A, p. 116.

¹⁴ Ashdod was part of the revolt of 712 B.C.E. against King Sargon of Assyria, along with Israel, Judah, Palestia, and the Trans-Jordan states (ARAB, 2, §§29f, 195). Sargon claims only to have retaken Ashdod (*ibid.*). Therefore, the quick surrender of Ashdod, which had been under Assyrian control until Ashdod's more recent revolt in 702 B.C.E., reflects its different status from the other Palestim states, who were allied with Judah during their successful revolt in 712 B.C.E. (see Chap. IV, pp. 54, n. 20).

¹⁵ See below Parallel Corpora A, p. 116. The city of Ushû was located on the mainland opposite Tyre.

¹⁶ 2 Kings, 18:19–21; Isa., 36:4–6; Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:1:2. That Shabaqo was the pharaoh of Egypt at this time, see App. F & K.

¹⁷ See below Parallel Corpora A, pp. 116f.

Ashkelon and deported its king and his family to Assyria.¹⁸ Sennacherib's eyes now turned toward King Hezekiah, the chief figure a few years earlier in the revolt of the Palestim and Judahite states from the Assyrian Empire.¹⁹

There can be little doubt that, while Sennacherib himself was taking the coastal road towards Ashkelon, most likely upon the road from Joppa,²⁰ a good part of his army was simultaneously marching southward on the central highway in order to make their initial strike on the kingdom of Judah. Isaiah, for example, reports that this branch of the Assyrian army turned and followed the road to Aiath, east of Bethel, then south to Migron, on to Michmash (about 8 miles north of Jerusalem), and then came to Geba (about 6 miles north of Jerusalem).²¹ As a good portion of the Assyrian army began overwhelming the fortified cities of Judah from the north, Sennacherib himself took his main force, turned eastward from Ashkelon, and began laying siege to the important Judahite fortress city of Lachish.²²

Hearing of the initial Assyrian advance against Palestia and Judah, Hezekiah quickly began reenforcing his fortifications at Jerusalem and making other preparations to resist a siege.²³ Yet when he heard how rapidly his defense cities fell, Hezekiah realized it was fruitless to continue his resistance. He sent to Sennacherib, now besieging Lachish, for conditions of peace.²⁴

Sennacherib made terms and Hezekiah, in response, sent the required tribute to the Assyrian king at Lachish. He also sent other gifts to Nineveh.²⁵ Hezekiah, as well, brought King Padi of Ekron out of prison and handed him over to Sennacherib.²⁶ He believed that the Assyrian king would now retire from Judah, leaving Hezekiah to peacefully govern his greatly reduced kingdom. But the Assyrian king had no intention of honoring this agreement. It was merely a ruse to financially weaken his Judahite foe. His true purpose was to deport the rebellious people of Judah to another distant land.²⁷ With this in mind, Sennacherib reneged on his treaty and, after

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ See below Parallel Corpora A, pp. 117–119. That Hezekiah was the ringleader in the revolt, see Chap. IV, p. 56, ns. 27 & 29; Chap. V, pp. 71f, n. 37.

²⁰ CIOT, p. 302.

²¹ Isa., 10:28–31.

²² See below Parallel Corpora A, pp. 117–121. Sennacherib, himself, began laying siege to Lachish, as noted in 2 Kings, 18:14.

²³ See 2 Chron., 32:2–8. See below Parallel Corpora A, pp. 118–119.

²⁴ See below Parallel Corpora A, pp. 119–120.

²⁵ See below Parallel Corpora A, pp. 119–120. Also see our discussion above Chap. VII, pp. 93f.

²⁶ Padi had been imprisoned by Hezekiah in Jerusalem prior to the Assyrian attack on that city (see below Parallel Corpora A, pp. 129–130; cf. 2 Kings, 18:7f). Yet after the blockade of Jerusalem began, when no one was allowed to enter or leave Jerusalem, Sennacherib was able to place Padi on the throne at Ekron (see below Parallel Corpora A, pp. 128–130). Sennacherib states in the Taylor Prism (3:14ff), “Padi, their king, I brought out of Jerusalem. I set him on the royal throne over them (the people of Ekron)” (AS, pp. 29–34; ARAB, 2, §§239–240). This data proves that Padi was brought out of Jerusalem before the blockade of that city began. Therefore, he was given into the hands of the king of Assyria at the time that Hezekiah paid tribute.

²⁷ This intention is directly stated by Rabshakeh as quoted in 2 Kings, 18:31f; Isa., 36:16f; Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:1:2.

Lachish surrendered, he sent a large force of men from Lachish under Rabshakeh to persuade the Judahites to open their capital city to be spoiled and to surrender themselves for deportation.²⁸

Rabshakeh gave Sennacherib's message to Hezekiah's chief men. When Hezekiah received these words from his officials, he tore his garments, put on sackcloth, and entered into the house of Yahweh. He also sent messengers to the prophet Isaiah seeking advice from Yahweh. Isaiah sent back to the king, foretelling him, among other things, that the Assyrian king would hear a report and turn back to his own land.²⁹ Relying upon the instructions from the prophet, Hezekiah sent word to the Assyrian representative that he refused to surrender. The Assyrian response was to shut up Jerusalem, throwing earthworks against the city gates, blockading the city so that no one could either enter or leave.³⁰

Egyptian Counterattack

In the next phase of the war the Assyrian king prepared to oppose the Egyptian and Kushite counterattack. A report that an Egyptian and Kushite army was marching to the aid of their Palestim (and Judahite) allies reached Sennacherib while he was still at Lachish. Rabshakeh, for example, while arguing against Hezekiah, speaks of the expected arrival of the forces coming from the king of Egypt (i.e. sent by the Ethiopian, Pharaoh Shabaqo) upon whom Hezekiah was relying.³¹

Josephus, likewise, reports that Sennacherib took the field against a combined Egyptian and Ethiopian force—an event which he distinguishes from the later arrival of Tirhaqah³²—at the same time that Rabshakeh was sent to spoil Jerusalem.³³ A day or two later, when Rabshakeh returned to Lachish, he found that Sennacherib had already moved against Libnah.³⁴ Libnah was very near the region of Altakû (Eltekeh), the scene of the battle between Sennacherib and the combined Egyptian and Ethiopian forces during Sennacherib's third campaign (see Map 1).³⁵ Libnah was most likely Sennacherib's camp during this conflict with the "countless host" of Egyptians and Kushites. After winning the battle, the Assyrian king seized the cities of Altakû (Eltekeh), Timnah, and Ekron.³⁶ He also killed the governors and nobles of Ekron who had rebelled and then returned the Assyrian loyalist Padi to that city's throne.³⁷

²⁸ See below Parallel Corpora A, pp. 125–126.

²⁹ See below Parallel Corpora A, pp. 126–128.

³⁰ See below Parallel Corpora A, p. 128.

³¹ 2 Kings, 18:20–24; Isa., 36:5–10.

³² The initial war with the Egyptians and Ethiopians is reported by Josephus in *Antiq.*, 10:1:1 §4). The arrival of Tirhaqah, after this first battle, is explained in Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:2:1 §17.

³³ See below Parallel Corpora A, p. 121, cf. p. 128.

³⁴ See below Parallel Corpora A, p. 128.

³⁵ See below Parallel Corpora A, pp. 129. For the locations of Eltekeh, Libnah and Lachish, see Chap. III, p. 40, n. 8.

³⁶ See below Parallel Corpora A, pp. 129f.

³⁷ See below Parallel Corpora A, pp. 129f.

After reporting the Assyrian victories—i.e., the defeat of the Egyptian and Ethiopian forces, the conquest of Palestia, the overthrow of the walled cities of Judah, and the reception of tribute from King Hezekiah—the Assyrian records break off their discussion of the war. Their silence is a reflection of the disaster that followed.

Invasion of Egypt

After his great victory over the Egyptian and Ethiopian hosts sent by Shabaqo, Sennacherib sent a large expeditionary force against the fortress city of Pelusium, the gateway city on the northeastern border of Egypt. Thus began the ill-fated part of his campaign. About three weeks later, after settling the affairs in Phoenicia and Palestia, the Assyrian king divided his army, leaving part of them at Jerusalem while he marched with the rest to Pelusium.³⁸ Meanwhile, an army of Egyptians under King Sethos had arrived at Pelusium.³⁹ The Assyrian siege force then spent a great deal of time raising earthworks to great heights against the city.⁴⁰

In the night before Sennacherib intended to begin his assault upon the city of Pelusium (i.e., around the night of Abib 2),⁴¹ his army was afflicted by an outbreak of plague (apparently brought to them by a great horde of mice).⁴² No sooner had this plague struck than Sennacherib received a report that Tirhaqah, the king of Kush, was coming out of his country to fight against him.⁴³ The Kushite king was coming to the aid of his Egyptian and Ethiopian allies in Egypt by making a spring offensive against their Assyrian foe.

The outbreak of a plague at Pelusium made it impossible for Sennacherib to meet the superior forces of Tirhaqah. Accordingly, the Assyrian king was compelled to quickly retreat and fall back to Jerusalem. There he expected to join up with the rest of his army. Because of these desperate circumstances, a great number of the implements of war were left behind at Pelusium, along with the dead Assyrian soldiers. When the Egyptians later entered what remained of the Assyrian camp, they found mice chewing at the bow strings of these abandoned weapons.⁴⁴

³⁸ See our discussion in Chap. VII, p. 96, and see below Parallel Corpora A, pp. 130f.

³⁹ See below Parallel Corpora A, pp. 130f.

⁴⁰ Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:1:4 §17.

⁴¹ For the date Abib 2, see below Parallel Corpora A, pp. 131f, n. 33.

⁴² See below Parallel Corpora A, pp. 131f. For a discussion of the plague, see Chap. III, p. 44, n. 36.

⁴³ See below Parallel Corpora A, pp. 131f. This report of the coming of Tirhaqah is a fulfillment of the prophecy earlier given to Hezekiah that Sennacherib would hear a report and return to his own land (see below Parallel Corpora A, pp. 127f).

⁴⁴ See below Parallel Corpora A, pp. 131f. The explanation of the Egyptians, that the defeat of the Assyrians was as the result of a host of mice eating through the bows and other weapons of the enemy, is readily explained. After coming into contact with these rodents and suffering from the disease they carried, the Assyrians fled the scene leaving many of their weapons behind. The mice, left to despoil the camp, were found by the Egyptians the next day gnawing at these weapons. The explanation of Josephus, that the mice were the instrument of a plague, brings the true cause of the destruction of the Assyrian army at Pelusium into focus. Flea-infested mice are known to carry plagues. The most likely cause of the illness and death among the Assyrian forces at Pelusium, therefore, would be a pneumonic plague, which easily would have led to a massive outbreak.

The Retreat

As Sennacherib began his retreat, he made one last-ditch effort to intimidate Hezekiah into submission. He sent Hezekiah letters warning him to surrender, reminding him that it was still the intention of the Assyrians to capture Jerusalem.⁴⁵ At that time (Abib 11),⁴⁶ Hezekiah became ill and was near death. He prayed to Yahweh to spare his life and to allow him a legitimate successor, since he was without a legal male heir. He was told by the prophet Isaiah that Yahweh would add 15 years to his life. As a sign that this was true, it was explained to Hezekiah that, on the 3rd day after, the sun's shadow would move backward 10 steps (hours) on the sundial at the house of Ahaz and, on that same day, he would both recover from his sickness and go up into the Temple.⁴⁷

A few days later (Abib 13), Sennacherib returned from his defeat at Pelusium and stationed himself at Nob just north of Jerusalem.⁴⁸ Not heeding the advice of his advisors to make an immediate attack upon the city of Jerusalem, Sennacherib decided instead to rest his army and to attack in the morning. He then sent messengers to Hezekiah ordering him to surrender. It was on that day, Abib 13, in the 15th year of Hezekiah, that the sun's shadow returned 10 steps.⁴⁹ Having recovered from his illness and upon receiving the words sent by the Assyrian king, Hezekiah, as foretold, went to the Temple.⁵⁰ Here he once again pleaded with Yahweh to save Jerusalem and its people. In response, Yahweh informed Hezekiah that the Assyrians would turn back on the road upon which they came. In addition, as a sign that the people of Jerusalem would remain in their land, this year they would eat from the field that which grows of itself (a Sabbath year), and the next year eat of the same (a Jubilee year), and in the 3rd year they would once again sow and harvest their own land.⁵¹ Hezekiah was also told by the prophet Isaiah that the Assyrian king would neither take the city, put up siege mounds, nor shoot an arrow against it.⁵²

That night, being Passover (Abib 14), 185,000 men in the "camp of the king of Assyria" were, like their associates at Pelusium, destroyed by a plague.⁵³ When Sennacherib woke up in the morning, he found his forces at Jerusalem decimated and those left to him likewise "in danger from a plague."⁵⁴ With such huge losses, all hopes for a military victory in the West vanished. Thrown into a state of alarm and terrible anxiety, and fearful for what remained of his army, Sennacherib fled northward, returning on the road

⁴⁵ See below *Parallel Corpora A*, pp. 132f.

⁴⁶ That Hezekiah's illness occurred on Abib 11, see below *Parallel Corpora A*, pp. 133–145.

⁴⁷ See below *Parallel Corpora A*, pp. 134–145.

⁴⁸ That Sennacherib arrived at Jerusalem on Abib 13, see below *Parallel Corpora A*, p. 136.

⁴⁹ See below *Parallel Corpora A*, pp. 136–145.

⁵⁰ See below *Parallel Corpora A*, p. 141.

⁵¹ For our discussion of this issue, see Chap. III, pp. 41–43.

⁵² See below *Parallel Corpora A*, pp. 141–144.

⁵³ See below *Parallel Corpora A*, pp. 144f.

⁵⁴ *Jos., Antiq.*, 10:1:5.

upon which his army had arrived, fleeing back home to Nineveh.⁵⁵ All that the Assyrian king could do was to record on his inscriptions those parts of the campaign that could be construed as a victory. Having fled from the Kushite king and unable to take the city of Jerusalem, the seal of Sennacherib's campaign now became the fabulous tribute paid earlier by King Hezekiah.⁵⁶ At the retreat of the Assyrians, Tirhaqah pushed into Asia where he formed a great empire for his homeland of Kush.⁵⁷

Remaining Questions and Issues

Our attention must now turn to the last vestiges of what are believed to be questions and issues of chronology claimed as impediments to the smoothness and harmony of the one-invasion history. A close examination shows that these assumed problems are in reality built upon misconstrued and premanufactured history. They are intended to cast doubt where none should exist. The following are the most important of these challenges and their rebuttals:

- “Why did Hezekiah both surrender and refuse to surrender?”⁵⁸
That is, “Why did Hezekiah surrender and pay tribute, only later to fail to surrender when Sennacherib demanded that the city be open to him?” Because Hezekiah came to terms in one part of the story and refused submission in another, it is believed that these represent two different invasions by Sennacherib.
 - This question glosses over the entire thrust of the history. In the first instance, Hezekiah believed that if he agreed to pay tribute his throne would be saved and his people would be allowed to retain their land. There was no demand in the first agreement to open the city to the invaders. Yet when Sennacherib reneged on his treaty, new conditions were drawn up: surrender the city and prepare its people for deportation.⁵⁹ Trusting in Yahweh, Hezekiah refused these new and destructive conditions.
- “Would Hezekiah have continued to rely on Egypt after the battle of Eltekeh?”⁶⁰
 - There is no record that he did. After the Assyrian victory at Eltekeh, Hezekiah relied on Yahweh.⁶¹ The Egyptian contribution to Judah was moot at this point. Indeed, there was every incentive not to surrender the city. It meant certain death for Hezekiah and his nobles, deportation of the remaining Judahites, and the spoiling of the city and its people. It was already clear that Sennacherib's word was worthless. Why should

⁵⁵ See below Parallel Corpora A, p. 146.

⁵⁶ See Chap. V, pp. 70–74.

⁵⁷ See App. H, and below Chap. XII.

⁵⁸ AUSS, 4.1, p. 22.

⁵⁹ 2 Kings, 18:27–32; Isa., 36:12–17; Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:1:2.

⁶⁰ AUSS, 4.1, p. 22.

⁶¹ See below Parallel Corpora A, pp. 128–145.

the Judahites trust him even if the Assyrians guaranteed the safety of Hezekiah and his nobles? If the Judahites resisted, they at least had a chance that Yahweh would deliver them.

- “Why was Hezekiah treated so leniently in spite of the fact that Hezekiah was the leading spirit of the revolt?”⁶²
 - There was no leniency. If Sennacherib could have broken into the city of Jerusalem, he certainly would have killed Hezekiah and the Judahite nobles, just as he had done to the nobles of Ekron.⁶³ No doubt this is why Hezekiah agreed to pay an enormous tribute in the first place, fearing personal reprisal if he surrendered and opened the city gates to the Assyrians. The illusion of leniency comes in the Assyrian records only because the Assyrian king was unable to conquer Jerusalem and, to save face, made it appear that the reception of tribute was the seal of his campaign.
- “Why was Jerusalem only blockaded and not besieged, captured, and destroyed?”⁶⁴
 - It was only blockaded because a major effort would have been required to break open the city (it took a year and a half for Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylonia to perform the same task). Furthermore, Pelusium had to be taken first because of its strategic location. Once Pelusium was secured and the Assyrian front with Egypt fixed, attention could turn towards a massive attack on and a long siege of Jerusalem.
- “What gave Hezekiah courage to continue resistance, after all his allies had been crushingly defeated?”⁶⁵
 - First, Josephus describes Hezekiah as a coward, fearing even to come out to meet with the Assyrian representatives.⁶⁶ This incident demonstrates that, at the beginning, it may not have been courage that pushed Hezekiah to resist but fear for his life. Second, the walls of Jerusalem were heavily fortified and he could have resisted an Assyrian onslaught and siege for several months. Third, and most importantly, he trusted in Yahweh, who promised to deliver him.
- “Why did Rabshakeh tell the Judahites not to trust in Yahweh but also claim that Yahweh had sent him to take the city?”⁶⁷
 - This question is based upon the belief in some quarters that different parts of Rabshakeh’s speech could represent two different campaigns. This

⁶² SIP, p. 18.

⁶³ See below Parallel Corpora A, pp. 129f.

⁶⁴ SIP, p. 18.

⁶⁵ SIP, p. 31, n. 64.

⁶⁶ Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:1:2.

⁶⁷ This is a summarization of the question posed in IAC, pp. 82f.

conclusion is far too extreme and unwarranted. The speech was merely Assyrian rhetoric meant to justify the Assyrian attack on Judah and their demand for surrender. Rabshakeh was calling attention to the fact that the previous Judahite king, Ahaz, had pledged loyalty to the Assyrians when he became their vassal.⁶⁸ In effect, the Judahites were obligated by a vassal treaty, a treaty broken by Hezekiah when he revolted.⁶⁹

- A unique feature of these vassal and alliance treaties was the fact that they were pledged by an oath in the name of the vassal's or ally's own deity.⁷⁰ Because the Judahites rebelled and broke their oath, Yahweh, Rabshakeh argued, was on the side of Assyria in this dispute. On this account, Hezekiah should surrender the city.⁷¹ At the same time, holding that the Assyrian deities were superior to Yahweh, Rabshakeh advised the Judahites not to rely upon either Yahweh or Hezekiah to deliver them out of the hand of the more powerful king of Assyria and the more powerful Assyrian deities.
- “Did the expedition of Rab-shakeh recounted in 2 Kings, xviii. 17 ff., occur before or after the battle of Altaku recounted in T [the Assyrian text]?”⁷² And with it, “When did Hezekiah pay his tribute, before or after the battle of Eltekeh?”⁷³

⁶⁸ The alliance between Assyria and Judah was formed by King Ahaz, the father of Hezekiah, when Ahaz was troubled by the nations of Aram (Syria) and Israel (2 Kings, 16:7–9; 2 Chron., 28:16–21).

⁶⁹ 2 Kings, 18:7.

⁷⁰ JBL, 78.3, pp. 199–204; BA, 17.3, p. 60; TC, pp. 29–153. E.g., 2 Chron., 36:11–13. Also as examples of these vassal and alliance treaties and the oaths required, see ANET, pp. 199–201, a Hatti (Khatti, Khitti, etc.) and Egyptian treaty sworn to by “a thousand gods of the male gods and female gods of them of the land of Hatti, together with a thousand gods of the male gods and of the female gods of them of the land of Egypt,” pp. 203–205, a Hatti (Khatti) and Amurru treaty sworn to by “gods and goddesses of the Hatti land and the gods and goddesses of Amurru land,” pp. 205f, a Hatti and Mitanni treaty sworn to by “the gods of the contracting parties,” followed by a list of Mitanni and Hatti deities, p. 532, a treaty between Idrimi and Pillya, sworn to by their gods, pp. 532f, a treaty between Assyria and Arpad, sworn to by the deities of each country, pp. 533f, Assyria and Tyre, sworn to by the deities of Assyria and the Baal deities of Phoenicia.

Childs (IAC, pp. 84f) takes an opposing stand based upon two points: First, he believes that it is a debatable question whether the Assyrians did require their vassals to swear by the vassal's own deities as well as by the Assyrian. He then cites Mendenhall (BA, 17.3, p. 60) as denying they did (when, in fact, Mendenhall supports the fact that they did). Neither does Childs offer proof that it is debatable. All evidence heretofore, as the authors and sources cited above demonstrate, proves that the vassals were commonly made to swear by their own deities. Second, Childs holds that Hezekiah's sin was not in profaning the name of Yahweh and breaking the oath in the treaty but by his removing the altars of Yahweh. This view is definitely incorrect. When Rabshakeh brought up the issue of Hezekiah removing the altars it was as an accusation that Hezekiah was abandoning Yahweh and causing the Judahites to forgo their true worship. Of course, Ahaz had actually adopted pagan Baal worship in the guise of Yahweh worship. Hezekiah had removed these altars built on high places in the name of Yahweh in order to purge the country from these pagan practices (see 2 Kings, 16:3–4, 10–18 [cf. 17:7–18], 18:1–6; 2 Chron., 28:1–4, 20–25, 29:1–19, 31:1). Rabshakeh was trying to lure the Judahites back into Baal worship, encouraging the old Israelite error of identifying Yahweh with Baal. If he could convince the Judahites of this argument, they would accept the treaty of Ahaz and surrender.

⁷¹ See below Parallel Corpora A, pp. 121–125.

⁷² BS, 63, 594.

⁷³ SIP, p. 22.

- Both the payment of tribute by Hezekiah and Rabshakeh's expedition happened before the battle of Altakû (Eltekeh). This point is established in three ways. First, according to the accounts in Scriptures and Josephus, Rabshakeh's arrival at Jerusalem occurred shortly after Hezekiah had paid the tribute and Sennacherib, in turn, reneged on the treaty.⁷⁴ Second, Rabshakeh's words to Hezekiah show an expectation of an impending Egyptian counterattack.⁷⁵ Third, Josephus notes that, when Sennacherib set out to meet the Egyptian and Kushite army, he had already left behind Rabshakeh with a large army to plunder Jerusalem.⁷⁶
- “Why did Sennacherib remove from Lachish to Libnah?”⁷⁷ That is, why move northwest and away from Jerusalem to confront Hezekiah?
 - Libnah lay near the plain of Eltekeh where the Assyrian forces battled the Egyptian and Kushite army. The Egyptians and Kushites came to Ekron on the Palestim coastal road and then moved southeast to oppose the Assyrian king.⁷⁸ The only logical move for the Assyrian king was to march northwest to oppose this threat (Map 1).
- “Why did Sennacherib not take advantage of his victory at Eltekeh and invade Egypt?”⁷⁹
 - The records prove that he did.⁸⁰
- It is assumed by some that Tirhaqah led an Egyptian army against Sennacherib,⁸¹ presupposing that the reference in Scriptures was to the pharaoh named Nefertem Taharqa of Egypt.
 - This view is offered despite the fact that there are no ancient sources making such a claim. This unsupported statement has merely added confusion to the issue of chronology by equating the Tirhaqah of the Scriptures with the Egyptian monarch of that same name. As we shall demonstrated in our study, it was Tsawi Terhaq, also known as Taharqa I Piye, the king of Kush, who opposed Sennacherib, not his son Nefertem Taharqa. Tsawi Terhaq (the Tirhaqah of the Scriptures) came out of his own country with a large army in order to assist his Egyptian allies.⁸² He therefore was at the head of an Ethiopian, not Egyptian, army.

⁷⁴ See below Parallel Corpora A, pp. 119–121.

⁷⁵ 2 Kings, 18:19–25; Isa., 36:4–10; Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:1:2 §6f.

⁷⁶ Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:1:1.

⁷⁷ BS, 63, p. 613.

⁷⁸ See discussion in Chap. VI, pp. 83–85.

⁷⁹ SIP, p. 16.

⁸⁰ See below Parallel Corpora A, pp. 129–133.

⁸¹ E.g., AHI, pp. 301, 302.

⁸² Thus the words of Josephus in *Antiq.*, 10:2:1, to the effect that Tirhaqah was coming to the aid of his Egyptian allies.

- Some conclude that Sennacherib fought with the Tirhaqah mentioned in Scriptures at Eltekeh.⁸³
 - Nevertheless, this view presents major problems. According to Scriptures, Sennacherib retreated from Tirhaqah; yet in the Assyrian inscriptions Sennacherib was victorious over the Egyptian and Kushite forces, going on to overthrow other cities. Because of this contradiction, it is determined that Scriptures and other sources have been wrong and have confused two different conflicts. Along with this assertion comes a second dispute. Advocates of the two-invasion scenario charge that the attack route recorded in Sennacherib's records for his third campaign is incompatible with an attack against Egypt and Tirhaqah.

The confusion represented by these conclusions and assertions are eliminated once it is admitted that there were two separate incidents: one at Eltekeh and another occurring later at Pelusium. The Assyrian king does mention "the kings of Muzri (Lower Egypt), the bowmen, chariots and horses of the king of Meluhha (Upper Egypt)" and "the charioteers and Muzri princes, together with the charioteers of the Meluhha," which he captured at the battle of Eltekeh.⁸⁴ Yet nowhere does he give the name of the monarch of Upper Egypt, nor does he imply that the pharaoh of Meluhha, let alone the king of Kush Proper, was anywhere near the scene of the battle. The Tirhaqah mentioned in Scriptures, on the other hand, personally led his army.⁸⁵ Therefore, if such a confrontation with Tirhaqah had occurred at Eltekeh, a victory over this Kushite king would most definitely have been the object of much boasting in Sennacherib's annals. Tirhaqah's name, as a result, would have been prominently mentioned by the Assyrian king.

More importantly, it is evident from the parallel accounts of our ancient sources, as shown in Parallel Corpora A, that the threat of Tirhaqah's advance happened at some point after the Eltekeh conflict. Josephus notes that Sennacherib went out to meet the Egyptian and Ethiopian forces when Rabshakeh was sent against Jerusalem to blockade the city.⁸⁶ This was an expected battle and, accordingly, points directly to the conflict at Eltekeh. Later, when Sennacherib heard that Tirhaqah and his army were coming out to fight, he was surprised and forced to retreat without offering battle.⁸⁷

Next, Josephus and Herodotus point out that Sennacherib retreated from Tirhaqah while the former was at Pelusium, Egypt.⁸⁸ These authors, we might

⁸³ E.g., NOT, p. 60.

⁸⁴ See below Parallel Corpora A, p. 129.

⁸⁵ 2 Kings, 19:9 and Isa., 37:9, both relate that the report given to Sennacherib stated that "he (Tirhaqah) has come out to fight with you." Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:1:4, states that Tirhaqah "was coming to the aid of the Egyptians with a large force."

⁸⁶ Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:1:1 §4.

⁸⁷ See below Parallel Corpora A, pp. 131f.

⁸⁸ Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:1:4 §17f; Herodotus, 2:141; and see below Parallel Corpora A, pp. 130–133.

note, have the only record of Sennacherib's location at the time of his retreat.⁸⁹ Eltekeh, on the other hand, was near Ekron in Palestia.⁹⁰ The victory of Assyria at Eltekeh, therefore, must not be confused with the Assyrian defeat at Pelusium. It was while Sennacherib besieged Pelusium that word of Tirhaqah's advancing army first arrived.⁹¹

Finally, ancient accounts testify that Sennacherib retreated and never fought with Tirhaqah.⁹² Yet the Assyrian records not only claim a battle at Eltekeh but reveal further military activity by the Assyrians immediately after that battle, at which time they besieged Eltekeh, Timnah, and Ekron.⁹³ Therefore, the battle on the plain of Eltekeh could not have been a conflict with Tirhaqah. In fact, as we have already demonstrated, the king of Meluhha who provided troops at Eltekeh and is alluded to in the inscriptions of Sennacherib was Shabaqo, the first Kushite pharaoh of Egypt's Dynasty XXV, who ruled as the sole king of that dynasty from 707–698 B.C.E. He was directly allied with the petty Egyptian dynasts during this period.

Conclusion

Our examination of the evidence demonstrates that there are no chronological conflicts between any of our ancient sources. Therefore, with no remaining obstacles, we are compelled to the conclusion that there was only one invasion of Judah by King Sennacherib. This single invasion is represented in the Assyrian records by Sennacherib's third campaign and is said to have started during the 14th year of King Hezekiah of Judah (702/701 B.C.E.). Accordingly, since the Assyrian army laying siege to Jerusalem was struck by a plague shortly after the beginning of the next year (the 15th year of Hezekiah), on the 14th of Abib, the Sabbath and Jubilee years are confirmed as the 15th and 16th years of King Hezekiah, the years 701/700 and 700/699 B.C.E.

The Sabbath year and Jubilee year of the 15th and 16th years of King Hezekiah, we must add, are not just assured to us by the evidence for Sennacherib's campaign against Judah. As we proceed through our study, it shall be demonstrated time and again that the Sabbath cycle represented by these above years are reaffirmed by the evidence for other Sabbath years. Together, the information for all the various known Sabbath years will prove that the System "A" cycle is unimpeachable.

⁸⁹ 2 Kings, 19:9; Isa., 37:9; Targ. Jon., 2 Kings, 19:9; Isa., 37:9, all tell of the retreat of the Assyrians from Tirhaqah but say nothing of Sennacherib's location at the time.

⁹⁰ See Chap. III, p. 40, n. 8.

⁹¹ Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:2:1.

⁹² 2 Kings, 19:9; Isa., 37:9; Jos., *Antiq.*, 10:1:4.

⁹³ See below Parallel Corpora A, pp. 128–130.

CHART D

KUSHITE RULERS OF EGYPT'S DYNASTIES 25 & 26

	Source	Years	B.C.E. (Julian Reckoning)
Shabaqo	I	15	707–694
	H	50	706–657
	E, EA, Eth, S	12 (Egypt & Kush)	707–696
	EI	10	705–696
	A	8	705–698
Shebitku	I	3	692–690
	E, EA, EI, S	12	695–684
	A	14	697–684
Taharqa II (Khu-Ré Nefertem)	I	26	689–664
	E, EA, EI, S	20	683–664
	A	18	683–666
Urud-Amun	I	2	663–662
	Eth	6 (in Kush)	663–658
Ta-Nuat-Amun	I	9	663–655
	Eth	4 (in Kush)	657–654

EARLY DYNASTY 26, KINGS OF SAIS

Snefer-Ra Piye (Taharqa I Piye, Ammeris)	I	27	696–670
	S	38	701–664
	E	12	696–685
	EA	18	696–679
	Eth	49 (in Kush)	706–658
Stephimates	E, EA, EI, A	7	684–678
Nechepsos	E, EA, EI, A	6	677–672
Nechao I (Nekau I)	E, EA, EI, A	8	671–664
Psamtik I (Psammetichus I)	I	55	663–609
	A, H	54	663–610
	E	45	656–610
	EA, K	44	655–612
	EI	43	654–612

A = Africanus E = Eusebius EA = Eusebius Armenian EI = Eusebius Interpretem
 Armenum Eth = Ethiopian King List H = Herodotus I = Inscriptions (highest date found
 or indicated) K = Khronographeion S = Sothis